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FOOD SITUATIONIntroduction

The amount of rice produced during Kampuchea's 1981 rainy season is estimated to be significantly less than the amount produced during the 1980 rainy season. The fall-off in rice production is attributable to unfavorable weather conditions that affected the primary rice crop throughout the June-October planting period just passed. As a result, a rice shortage of at least 277,000 metric tons (about 30 percent of estimated minimum needs) is anticipated for 1982. The shortage may prove to be larger -- upwards of 350,000 metric tons -- if output from late plantings and the minor, dry season rice crop fail to meet expectations. In the absence of assistance from abroad, exhaustion of domestically-produced rice supplies is estimated to occur no later than the July-August period of 1982. Hungry and destitute people continue to arrive at the Thai-Kampuchea border in search of assistance.

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Rice Production

In December 1980, Phnom Penh authorities announced that the planting goal for the 1981 rainy season rice crop would be 1.7 million hectares, a 13 percent increase over the unmet 1980 goal. Prospects for meeting the increased goal were not good even at the time it was announced, and during the spring and summer of 1981 adverse weather conditions further reduced chances that the planting goal could be met. While little could be done about continuing shortages of draft animals, farm machinery, and

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fuel, the early arrival of rains gave reason to hope for a successful crop.

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The early rains proved to be heavier than usual and resulted in extensive flooding before rice could be planted, especially in areas bordering the Tonle Sap. The early rains were also short lived and gave way to a period of drought that lasted throughout most of the regular planting season. To be sure, some portions of the country did receive rainfall during the summer months, but the drought was sufficiently widespread to result in serious crop losses. In addition, the dry conditions made land preparation extremely difficult -- draft animals were hard put to turn the sunbaked soil.

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Crop-limiting drought problems were compounded by the early rise of the Mekong River. Heavy rains in Laos and southwestern China fed large amounts of water into the upper reaches of the Mekong in July and early August. By mid-August Phnom Penh authorities were calling not only for increased efforts to combat drought, but also for measures to be taken to save the capital city from being inundated. The Mekong had reached flood stage more than a month earlier than usual and the Tonle Sap rose once again. Rice and other crops planted near the river and the lake were either washed away or submerged. Kampuchean peasants were confronted with the paradox of seeing rising floodwaters while standing under a blazing sun.

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The negative effects of weather-related problems are apparent when results of the 1980 rainy season crop are compared with estimates of the likely results from the 1981 crop. Data given to representatives of the United Nations' Food and

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Agriculture Organization (FAO) during their 23 October-4 November 1981 food assessment mission to Kampuchea indicate that 1.23 million hectares of rice were harvested from the 1980 rainy season rice crop. The 1981 rice crop is estimated to total only 1.07 million hectares (13 percent less than the 1980 crop area). Addition of the area harvested from the 1980/81 dry season crop and that estimated to be harvested from the coming 1981/82 dry season crop raises total harvested areas for the two crop years to 1.32 million hectares during the 1980/81 crop year and only 1.19 million hectares during the current 1981/82 crop year -- a 10 percent decrease from the year-earlier performance.

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Not only is the harvestable area down from that of a year ago, but yields from the main, rainy season rice crop are also expected to be lower this year because of the adverse weather conditions. The 1980 rainy season crop yielded an average of 1.19 metric tons of paddy rice per hectare of land harvested. The 1981 crop is estimated by the FAO to yield only 1.08 metric tons per hectare. The combined effect of reduced harvestable area and lower yields is to decrease the estimated output from the 1981 rainy season rice crop to 1.16 million metric tons of paddy, 21 percent less than the 1.47 million metric tons harvested from the 1980 crop.

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The FAO estimated that part of production gap would be filled by improving output from the 1981/82 dry season rice crop now being planted. Both the area planted and yields are to be increased, resulting in 23 percent more area available for harvest and yields 96 percent higher than for the 1980/81 crop. If the FAO projections are realized, paddy output from the dry

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season rice crop will be more than double that achieved a year ago -- 293,000 metric tons as compared with 114,500 metric tons from the 1980/81 crop. [] 25X1

Even with a successful dry season crop, however, estimated total paddy production will still be less than that achieved in during the 1980/81 crop year -- 1.45 million metric tons as compared with a total of 1.58 million metric tons from last year's crops. The amount of consumable milled rice derived from the harvest will also be lower -- 691,000 metric tons from the 1981/82 crop as opposed to 757,000 metric tons a year ago. [] 25X1

Rice Requirement and Deficit

Estimation of the total rice requirement for Kampuchea is heavily dependent on the numbers used to represent the size of the country's population and ration size. The numbers provided by Phnom Penh authorities (6.59 million in 1981, and an estimated 6.79 million in 1982) have been criticized in recent months as being too high. Phnom Penh's 1981 population figure is reputed to have been arrived at as part of the preparations for elections conducted in May 1981, and the 1982 figure was projected assuming a 3 percent population growth rate. While we have no firm information upon which to base a challenge to these figures, we also have no basis for affirming them.* In the absence of a firm alternative, therefore, the 1982 population figure provided by Phnom Penh authorities and accepted by the FAO will be used here. [] 25X1

*On the basis of the 1962 census and events that have occurred since then, we estimated Kampuchea's population to have been 5.565 million people as of 1 January 1981. See GSM 80-10207, December 1980. [] 25X1

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As in the case of population figures, there has been disagreement about the ration size used to calculate rice requirements for Kampuchea. The FAO has used a ration of 12 kilograms of rice per person per month as the basis for estimating the country's total rice requirement, describing that amount as a minimum emergency ration. This ration, equivalent to about 400 grams per day, has been criticized in recent months as being too large and thus serving to inflate the estimated amount of rice needed to feed the country -- the argument being that the ration should be reduced to reflect consumption of non-rice foods. []

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The FAO itself has stated that historical data indicate average per capita rice consumption of 600-700 grams per day during the 15 year period ending in 1960, and that the emergency ration of about 400 grams per day "...is expected to be supplemented by other local food supplies such as fish, poultry, maize, manioc, fruit, vegetables, sugar, etc." (emphasis added). The World Food Program's 1980 "Khmer Food Programme Handbook" sets forth a basic ration consisting of 400 grams of rice plus 110 grams of beans, fish, and cooking oil per day for border camp residents -- people not normally engaged in the nutritionally more demanding work associated with raising crops and tending fields. A variety of sources indicate that Vietnamese troops in Kampuchea, as well as their PRK counterparts, are provided with 20-24 kilograms of rice each month, or 660-790 grams per day. []

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In another Asian setting, research has indicated that the average citizen of China consumes 470 grams of grain (rice, wheat, corn, and/or other grains) each day plus about 540 grams

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of vegetables, potatoes, fruits, meat, fish, and eggs. Indeed, the United Nations' Disaster Relief Organization (UNDRO) recommended in 1981 that people in two flood and drought stricken provinces of China be provided with grain supplements in order to raise their "...already minimal ration of 400 grams..." to about 650 grams per day in order to assure proper nourishment. 25X1

Given the considerations noted above, we feel that use of the 12 kilogram ration in calculating Kampuchea's emergency rice requirements is justified. Any reduction in the ration size would result in underestimating minimum needs. 25X1

A population of 6.79 million people consuming 12 kilograms of rice each month will require a total of 978,000 metric tons of rice during the course of a year. Since anticipated output from the 1981/82 rice crops will total to only 691,000 metric tons of consumable rice, a shortage of 287,000 metric tons is expected to occur. Late deliveries of food aid in the form of rice from the 1981 allotment are expected to reduce the shortage by 10,000 metric tons, leaving a net rice deficit of 277,000 metric tons or nearly 30 percent of the 1982 requirement. This deficit is equivalent to emergency rations for 107 days and implies that supplies will be exhausted sometime in late July or early August 1982, well before the start of the next major harvest in November. 25X1

Cautionary Note

The main, rainy season rice crop is only now (mid-December) being harvested and the dry season crop is in the process of being planted. None of the estimated yields or outputs are yet

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in hand nor are they guaranteed. Any number of contingencies could arise that would act to reduce the amount of rice that ultimately becomes available for consumption. Two distinct possibilities are that weather conditions will diminish the harvest from the main crop and that the prospective dry season crop might not meet expectations. ☐

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Weather conditions in Kampuchea have been rather wet since the beginning of the harvest period in early November. Indeed, the return of rains sparked hopes that late plantings of rice might help reduce the size of the deficit. At the same time, however, peasants are trying to harvest grain amid rains that threaten knock down ripened stands or, worse, flood fields once again. Grain already harvested must be dried and wet weather delays that vital procedure, increasing the possibilities for spoilage or sprouting of the the grain. The Phnom Penh media reported local flooding in some parts of the country in November and southeastern Thailand suffered extensive flood damage from heavy downpours in mid-December. Cloud cover associated with the storms in Thailand extended over Kampuchea and may well have brought heavy rains to that country as well. At this time it is not possible to estimate the amount of grain that may be lost to such adverse conditions. ☐

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The increase of more than 150 percent in expected output from the dry season rice crop is based on several optimistic assumptions. The most important of these are that more than 9,000 metric tons of suitable rice seed, almost 20,000 metric tons of fertilizers, numerous pumps, and sufficient amounts of fuel will be made available to farmers when and where they can be best used. Given the difficulty Phnom Penh authorities have had

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with similar requirements in recent months, there is little reason to be sanguine about prospects for the current effort. [REDACTED]

Should the dry season rice crop now being planted turn out to be similar to that raised a year ago instead of markedly better, output will still be increased but not to the level projected by the FAO assessment mission. Given an average yield identical to that of a year ago and a like proportion of the planned area actually harvested, output from the dry season crop will total only about 142,000 metric tons of paddy (up 24 percent over last year's 114,500 metric tons) instead of the projected 293,000 metric tons. Output of consumable milled rice for the entire crop year will be reduced from the 691,000 metric tons now anticipated to only 617,000 metric tons. The rice deficit will be enlarged by 74,000 metric tons to 351,000 metric tons, pushing the date when domestically produced rice supplies are exhausted back into early July 1982. [REDACTED]

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Finally, the Phnom Penh media have been unusually quiet about harvest prospects in recent weeks. Not since late September when it was announced that 60 percent of the rice planting target had been fulfilled has there been reporting about planting progress on a nationwide basis. Instead, reporting has been limited to plans for the dry season crop and sketchy descriptions of conditions and achievements in individual districts and a few provinces. Since a lack of reporting via the media has usually indicated problems in the past, the current virtual silence about the size and success of the 1981 rainy season rice crop is not encouraging. Indeed, Khmer arriving at the Thai border recently have been described by UNICEF officials as hungry and raggedly dressed people, some showing signs of

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malnutrition, and most in despair over prospects for the future. The concurrent low volume of media reporting on agricultural progress and the appearance of destitute people at the Thai-Kampuchea border does not augur well for the food supply outlook in Kampuchea during 1982.

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